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EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL DECEPTION:
LEARNING THE LESSONS OF MIDWAY AND DESERT STORM

by

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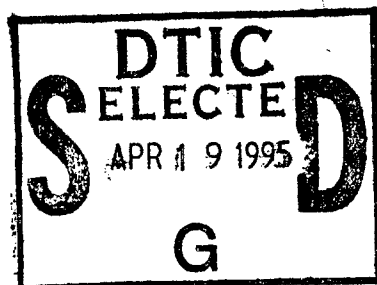
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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16 June 1995



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Accession For	
NTIS	CRA&I <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
DTIC	TAB <input type="checkbox"/>
Unannounced <input type="checkbox"/>	
Justification _____	
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Distribution /	
Availability Codes	
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A-1	

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
Approved for public release; Distribution Unlimited

THIS QUALITY REPRODUCED 5

UNCLASSIFIED

Security Classification This Page

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority: Not Applicable			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule: Not Applicable			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: Joint Military Operations Department			
6. Office Symbol: 1C		7. Address: Naval War College, 686 Cushing Rd., Newport, RI 02841-5010	
8. Title (UNCLASSIFIED): EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL DECEPTION: LEARNING THE LESSONS OF MIDWAY AND DESERT STORM			
9. Personal Authors: Alcala, Robert W., LCDR, USN			
10. Type of Report: Final		11. Date of Report: 1995 February 13	
12. Page Count: 21			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Operational, Deception, Integration, Economy of Force, Midway, Desert Storm, Principles.			
15. Abstract: The successful application of military deception is guided by the principles of war and by the principles of military deception. In particular, the principles of economy of force and integration serve the operational planner by ensuring an efficient use of military deception. Two historical case studies are presented to illustrate the degree to which the above principles were applied during the Battle of Midway and operation DESERT STORM. The Japanese deception plan failed to adequately incorporate the economy of force principle by devoting too many carrier assets to the Aleutian campaign. Likewise, the coalition's amphibious landing deception plan utilized almost an entire division of embarked Marines to accomplish what a much smaller force could have done. Additionally, the amphibious deception plan was never fully integrated into the overall campaign plan, and indeed, became a deception plan by default. Alternative allocations of forces are suggested that would have led to more efficient deception plans, and lessons learned are highlighted to promote the consideration of the principles of economy of force and integration into future operational planning.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
18. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
19. Name of Responsible Individual: Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department			
20. Telephone: (401) 841-3414/4120		21. Office Symbol: 1C	

Security Classification of This Page UNCLASSIFIED

Abstract of

EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL DECEPTION: LEARNING THE LESSONS OF MIDWAY AND DESERT STORM

The successful application of military deception is guided by the principles of war and by the principles of military deception. In particular, the principles of economy of force and integration serve the operational planner by ensuring an efficient use of military deception.

Two historical case studies are presented to illustrate the degree to which the above principles were applied during the Battle of Midway and operation DESERT STORM. The Japanese deception plan failed to adequately incorporate the economy of force principle by devoting too many carrier assets to the Aleutian campaign. Likewise, the coalition's amphibious landing deception plan utilized almost an entire division of embarked Marines to accomplish what a much smaller force could have done. Additionally, the amphibious deception plan was never fully integrated into the overall campaign plan, and indeed, became a deception plan by default.

Alternative allocations of forces are suggested that would have led to more efficient deception plans, and lessons learned are highlighted to promote the consideration of the principles of economy of force and integration into future operational planning.

Thesis

The successful application of military deception at the operational level of warfare is important to every CINC, JTF Commander, or planning staff. In view of continuing reductions in U.S. military force structure, this valuable force multiplier must be applied efficiently throughout the planning process. Guidance for applying military deception is found in both the principles of war and the principles of military deception. An examination of the Japanese deception plan during the Battle of Midway and the U.S.-led coalition's deception plan during operation DESERT STORM will show that the coalition planners failed to learn the lessons of history by neglecting the principles of integration and economy of force.

Definition of Terms

Joint Pub 3-58 describes military deception as "...a tool to be used by joint force commanders (JFCs) to assist them in accomplishing their missions."¹ Military deception can be effective by utilizing a relatively small force to present a false picture of the battlefield to the enemy. The adversary may then be led to expend effort and resources to a secondary point thus violating his own principles of warfare especially mass. The attractiveness of military deception is its high potential payback for relatively little investment. As such, military deception must be considered for inclusion in all operational plans.

Including military deception into one's operational scheme requires guidance. This guidance is found in the principles of war and the less well known principles of military deception. Of the nine principles of war, surprise and economy of force are most relevant to operational deception. The focus of this paper will be on economy of force.

"Economy of force is the judicious employment and distribution of forces. It is the measured allocation of available combat power to such tasks as ... deception... in order to achieve mass elsewhere at the decisive point and time."² Economy of force, therefore, serves as a regulator of military deception since it would not make sense to dedicate more forces to a deception operation, a secondary effort, than to the main point of attack.

Just as warfare in general is based upon principles, so too, is military deception based upon its own principles. The principles of military deception include: focus, objective, centralized control, security, timeliness, and integration.³ While this paper will deal primarily with three of these principles; focus, objective, and integration, it is the principle of integration that will be highlighted.

The principle of integration states that "each deception must be fully integrated with the basic operation that it is supporting."⁴ That is, deception planning must be integral to a commander's concept of operations at every stage of

development and not added as an afterthought independent of operational planning.

The Japanese at Midway

The first historical example illustrating the application of military deception is the Japanese deception plan during the Battle of Midway. The Japanese planning for the battle illustrates several critical points. First, it is clear that the Japanese placed great reliance upon deception as a war fighting technique. In addition to the main invasion effort, dubbed Operation MI, the overall plan included a deception plan to attack portions of the Aleutian islands, dubbed Operation AL. Their plan to lure out the remaining U.S. Pacific Fleet, and in particular, the American carriers was ambitious and complex. While the Japanese planned all along to capture territory in the Aleutians, the real objective of this phase of their overall plan was to act as bait.⁵

By dedicating a substantial force toward Operation AL the Japanese hoped to force Admiral Nimitz to commit his remaining carrier strength to come to the defense of U.S. national territory. This portion of their operational scheme was viable in several ways. First, it targeted the American theater commander, that is, the one whose decision it was to commit U.S. forces (focus). Second, the deception plan identified a specific desired result, namely, influencing the American commander to commit his carrier force to the Aleutians thereby causing this force to be out of position

when the attack on Midway began (objective). Finally, though the plan was flawed, it was fully integrated from the beginning of planning into the overall operational scheme (integration).

While the Japanese security failure via the compromise of their communications ciphers has been the topic of numerous works, it is the relationship between military deception and the principle of economy of force that will be examined.

The composition of the Japanese fleet dedicated to Operation MI is fairly well remembered, particularly the four ill-fated fleet carriers of the First Carrier Striking Force. What is less well known is that, in the original Japanese plan for Operation MI, the First Carrier Striking Force was to be composed of six fleet aircraft carriers and not four. The *Shokaku* and the *Zuikaku* each with a normal complement of 72 aircraft were to accompany the *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu*, and *Soryu*.⁶

Additionally, two aircraft carriers, the *Ryujo* and the *Junyo* (with 51 aircraft combined), would be dedicated to the Northern Force attacking the Aleutians. One carrier, the *Zuiho* (with 24 aircraft), would sortie with the Midway invasion force to be detached to support the Aleutian operation at a prearranged time. Furthermore, an additional carrier, the *Honsho* (with 15 aircraft), would accompany the First Fleet main body. The original plan for Operations MI and AL, therefore, included the employment of nine Japanese carriers!

The results of the Battle of the Coral Sea were to become a significant factor for the Japanese. Prior to this battle the Japanese could expect an advantage in aircraft carriers of nine to four (not including the *Saratoga* undergoing repairs at Puget Sound) for operations MI and AL.⁷ As a result of the Battle of the Coral Sea the *Shokaku* and the *Zuikaku* were unavailable for Midway as originally planned due to structural damage to *Shokaku* and a serious mauling of the *Zuikaku* air group.⁸ The *Shoho*, which was sunk at Coral Sea was not allocated for Midway. The revised overall carrier ratio given the loss of the *Lexington* was then seven to three.

Significantly, the Japanese deployed their forces in non-supporting dispositions. Assets dedicated to the Aleutians would be unable to assist those of the First Carrier Striking Force if required. Conversely, the Americans concentrated their carriers together in one formation. Therefore, the ratio between the two main carrier forces became four Japanese (with 229 aircraft) to three American (with 234 aircraft) instead of the planned six to three.⁹ The Japanese were actually outnumbered, with respect to aircraft, at the critical point of the battle.

The relative combat power of the two carrier forces facing each other on June 4th was fairly even, but not because the Japanese failed to dedicate sufficient forces to the overall operation. Rather, it was because the Japanese plan dedicated a total of three aircraft carriers (with 75 aircraft

embarked) to a secondary effort, namely the deception operation in the Aleutians.

History has recorded the slim margin upon which the battle turned. It is likely that the assignment of additional assets, for example the *Zuiho*, to the First Carrier Striking Force would have provided additional air search assets thereby providing an earlier discovery of the American carriers. The *Zuiho*, which was initially assigned to the Midway invasion force, was out of position to support the northern force as planned. Therefore, the *Zuiho's* reassignment would not have detracted from the deception effort.

In light of the losses sustained during the Battle of the Coral Sea the critical mistake the Japanese planners made was that they made no adjustment to the composition of the First Carrier Striking Force. The Japanese violated the economy of force principle of war by dedicating too many assets to a secondary effort.

The Americans at Midway

In contrast to the Japanese efforts at operational deception, the Battle of Midway also provides an excellent example of operational deception that did not violate the principle of economy of force. Since one of the keys to the overall Japanese plan was to lure out the American aircraft carriers, the accurate location of those potential targets was critical to Japanese decision-making.

Admiral Nimitz realized the importance of concealing the location of his carriers. In a skillful application of military deception he ordered two U.S. ships, the *Tangier* and the *Salt Lake City*, to simulate a task force's flying operations by broadcasting on carrier radio frequencies in the southwest Pacific.¹⁰

As part of the Japanese Midway strike plan the second wave of aircraft, including their most experienced aircrews, was configured with anti-ship ordnance in case an enemy fleet was discovered. The lack of information about the presence of American carriers in the vicinity of Midway contributed to the crucial decision to rearm the Japanese strike force for land attack when a second attack on Midway was deemed necessary.

Thus, a modest investment in resources lulled the Japanese commanders into a false sense of security by supplying them with information that the U.S. carriers were still operating in the southwest Pacific and not in the vicinity of Midway.

The Amphibious Deception During DESERT STORM

Another historical case that is illustrative of the relationship between military deception and the principle of economy of force is the Coalition ground offensive during Operation DESERT STORM. As in the Japanese case at Midway, the attacking force, the Coalition, included substantial deception operations into their operational scheme. But of the various examples of military deception employed during the

Gulf War, the threatened amphibious landing against the coast of Kuwait bears further scrutiny. Although this particular portion of the deception operations plan is often cited as a success story, closer examination reveals that some of the lessons of the past have not been learned.

Overall, the "...deception plan was intended to convince Iraq the Coalition main attack would be directly into Kuwait, supported by an amphibious assault. The plan also sought to divert Iraqi forces from the Coalition main attack and to fix Iraqi forces in eastern Kuwait and along the Kuwaiti coast."

At first glance the deception plan appears sound. By once again applying the principles of military deception it is clear that the amphibious assault deception plan targeted the Iraqi leadership (focus). It also had a clear objective. By fixing in place those Iraqi forces arrayed along the Kuwaiti coastline, the main effort, in the form of the famous "left hook," could be accomplished more easily.

But what of the principle of integration? At what point did the amphibious operation against the Kuwaiti coastline become a deception operation instead of an actual landing?

The desirability to conduct an actual amphibious assault in the vicinity of Kuwait seems to have waxed and waned, with various sponsors, throughout the CINCCENT decision-making process. Initially, it appears that the greatest likelihood that a landing would take place was during Operation DESERT SHIELD since during the mid-August 1990 time frame "... the

distinct possibility existed that an amphibious assault would be required to defend against an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia."¹² As the threat to Saudi Arabia decreased in the Fall the possibility of an amphibious landing also decreased.

As the planning process shifted from the defense to the offense an amphibious assault was deemed unnecessary. The initial plan for a ground offensive was developed in October and included only a single corps attacking into the strength of the Iraqi positions. No amphibious assault was planned.¹³ In part, this was due to the fact that CENTCOM's Special Plans Group, the so-called Jedi Knights, had not consulted the Marines as late as early November.¹⁴

Late in December, however, the MARCENT commander, Lieutenant General Walter Boomer, expressed concern for logistic support should the ground campaign become extended. This concern, which was shared by VII Corps, led to Marine planning for an amphibious landing. The landing would allow the Coalition to open a forward logistics base in Kuwait to take advantage of available sea-based logistics.

CINCCENT, General Schwarzkopf, decided to allow the Marine planners to come up with their own plan for the employment of the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) ashore and any supporting amphibious assault by the Amphibious Task Force (ATF). CENTCOM's planning team responded to this development by presenting a new plan in which the MEF itself would serve as a giant feint, again with no requirement for an amphibious

landing. Had CINCCENT approved this plan it would have satisfied the principle of integration by including the deception plan in the main attack plan. Moreover, the principle of economy of force would have been served because the MEF's fixing attack would not draw as many resources as the Marine plan to advance all the way to Kuwait city. The ATF Marines afloat and their air support assets could be used elsewhere. General Schwarzkopf, however, supported the Marines and reaffirmed his decision to let the Marines plan their own attack.¹⁵

The final plan for the ground offensive was approved by the Secretary of Defense in December. It included, as one of its operational imperatives, the use of "... operational deception to fix or divert Republican Guard and other heavy units away from the main effort."¹⁶ Specifically, the CENTCOM plan outlined that the "... main attack would be supported by an elaborate deception operation, including an amphibious feint, and by supporting attacks along the Kuwaiti-Saudi border to fix Iraqi forces in Kuwait and to liberate Kuwait City."¹⁷ Except for the plan to liberate Kuwait City the new plan was essentially the same as CENTCOM's planners had advocated. As with the original plan for the ground offensive an actual amphibious assault was not included.

At this point it appears, at least from CENTCOM's perspective, that the amphibious landing was off. But the

Marine planners, working independently of the CENTCOM planners, continued to prepare for one.

"On 6 January, NAVCENT issued a warning order directing the ATF to finalize plans for an amphibious assault on the Kuwaiti coast. The final plans for what had become known as Operation DESERT SABER called for the ATF to conduct an amphibious assault north of Ash Shuaybah..."¹⁸ This warning order, coming after the approval of the final ground offensive plan, was the result of CINCCENT's decision to allow the preparation of two separate ground plans and shows that the decision to use the ATF in an actual landing was still not finalized one way or another.

During a planning meeting attended by CINCCENT on 2 February, 16 days after the air campaign had begun, the issue of an amphibious landing was finally brought to a head. After being presented with the Marines' plan for an assault, including the extensive time required for mine clearing and other preparation operations, General Schwarzkopf made up his mind against the landing.¹⁹ At the conclusion of this meeting MARCENT finally gave in and agreed that a coastal supply route, and therefore an amphibious landing, would not be necessary.

From this time forward, three weeks prior to the start of the ground offensive, a large scale amphibious assault was no longer a realistic possibility yet the forces to conduct the assault were kept afloat.

In an 8 February message to NAVCENT, CINCCENT noted, "... an amphibious assault into Kuwait, or the credible threat to execute one, is an integral part of the overall campaign plan for Operation Desert Storm."²⁰ Even after his mind was made up against the amphibious assault General Schwarzkopf retained the *option* to conduct one. As such, the amphibious feint deception plan violated the principle of integration and indeed appears to have been an afterthought when the amphibious landing was deemed unnecessary.

Economy of Force Considerations

The rapid pace and unquestioned success of the ground offensive may have rendered debate on the amphibious operation academic. But when examined from an economy of force perspective it is clear that better use of the afloat Marines could have been planned for.

On the eve of the initiation of the ground offensive the ATF component of U.S. Marines was substantial. It included the 4th and 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigades (MEBs) and the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable (MEU-SOC). The 36 ships of the ATF embarked "... approximately 17,000 Marines, built around two regimental landing teams, with five infantry battalions, plus supporting arms..."²¹ While this landing force was not "tank heavy", it nevertheless represented a division sized force with considerable combat power, including organic air support assets. The failure to commit this force to support operations ashore was a waste of

combat power that might have been needed for the ground offensive.

Although history has shown that the ATF was not required ashore, the military balance of power was thought to be far less one-sided during the planning for the ground offensive in December of 1990.

Using CENTCOM's assumption that the air campaign would destroy or neutralize approximately half of the Iraqi forces in the Kuwait Theater of Operations, the force correlations by attack axis were (Coalition forces/Iraqi forces): supporting attack 1.3/1; main attack 1.4/1; Egyptian/Syria attack 1.4/1; and MEF 0.75/1.²² Though these ratios vary according to source, they clearly did not approach the historical 3/1 desired by an attacking force. Of particular note is the MEF whose job it was to breach the Kuwait border defenses, hold and destroy Iraqi forces to their front, hold Iraqi tactical and operational reserves to prevent reinforcement of Iraqi forces in the West, block Iraqi forces' retreat from southeast Kuwait and Kuwait City and help Arab forces enter Kuwait City.

To accomplish these ambitious objectives the MEF would begin the attack with a numerically inferior force. Meanwhile, almost an entire division's worth of Marines would be dedicated to an amphibious deception, designed to fix in place those same Iraqi forces faced by the MEF.

The concern for the MEF's ability to accomplish its mission is clear from the statements made by Marine leaders

during the planning stage. Especially noteworthy is a statement by Lieutenant General Boomer that the MEF would accomplish its mission but with a high casualty rate.²³

An alternative plan for the use of the ATF Marines became apparent as the ground offensive commenced. On 24 February the 5th MEB began landing through Al-Mish'ab and Al-Jubayl. "Although experiencing little active combat, the MEB assisted in mopping up operations, EPW control, and security duties, while providing the MEF commander, whose two Marine divisions were fully committed, added tactical and operational flexibility."²⁴ Given the concern expressed over the MEF's objectives in the planning stage, and given the decision to forego a large scale amphibious landing, a better option would have been to land both the 4th and 5th MEBs earlier to function as a reserve for the MEF.

While the necessity of this reserve seems low in retrospect, these additional forces would have been highly desirable during the planning stage. As for the amphibious raids and feints actually carried out, they were conducted primarily by elements of the 13th MEU (SOC) including small numbers of aircraft, naval gunfire support, and Navy Seals.²⁵

Here, then, was an operational deception plan in keeping with the economy of force principle. These relatively small scale efforts were adequate to obtain the desired high payback, fixing the Iraqi coastal defenders in place utilizing raids and feints. Clearly, the 4th and 5th MEBs could have

been committed to supporting the MEF ashore without any degradation of the amphibious deception plan.

Lessons Learned

Through a brief analysis of two case studies, this paper has examined the application of operational deception in relation to the principles of economy of force and integration. The implications for the future are important. As the U.S. military's force structure continues to decrease every means possible will be required to maintain the edge in combat operations. By applying deception to an operational scheme, a force multiplying effect may be obtained without excessive allocation of resources.

Military deception is as old as warfare itself and as our focus on the operational level of warfare expands, the military deception component must not be neglected. Planning for deception operations must be integral to the overall planning effort and deception forces must be utilized efficiently.

In the first case study, the Japanese prepared an elaborate deception operation, and although they integrated the plan into their overall scheme they did so inefficiently. The battle may well have been lost because they failed to apportion forces effectively between their main and secondary efforts.

The analysis of the second case study may appear to argue with success. But if the appropriate lessons are to be drawn

from DESERT STORM, more than just the results must be examined. If Iraq had been less of a paper tiger the combat power of the ATF Marines would have been sorely missed had the Republican Guard been able to counter-attack following the MEF's initial advance.

Furthermore, the exclusion of the Marines from the initial planning process, and the subsequent separate planning effort undertaken by them, certainly violated the principle of integration, and not just from a deception perspective.

Military deception can be a significant force multiplier. But to achieve the maximum benefit from this warfighting tool, a commitment to the principles of economy of force and integration is necessary. Effective deception operations are efficient and do not detract from the main effort. Future planners would do well to learn these lessons from the experiences of Midway and DESERT STORM.

NOTES

1. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Deception, JCS Pub 3-58 (Washington: 1994), p. I-2.
2. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, JCS Pub 3-0 (Washington: 1993), p. A-2.
3. Joint Doctrine for Military Deception, p. I-2.
4. Ibid., p. I-3.
5. H. P. Willmott, The Barrier and the Javelin: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies, February to June 1942 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), p. 92.
6. Ibid., p. 105.
7. Ibid., p. 172.
8. Ibid., p. 100.
9. Ibid., p. 343.
10. Ibid., p. 342.
11. U.S. Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War - Final Report to Congress (Washington: 1992), p. 102.
12. Ibid., p. 294.
13. Ibid., p. 86.
14. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), p. 159.
15. Ibid., p. 161.
16. U.S. Department of Defense, p. 90.
17. Ibid., p. 100.
18. Ibid., p. 296.
19. Ibid., p. 299.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 297.
22. Ibid., p. 112.

23. Douglas W. Craft, An Operational Analysis of the Persian Gulf War (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College. Strategic Studies Institute, 1991), p. 28.

24. U.S. Department of Defense, p. 304.

25. Douglas Waller, "Secret Warriors," Newsweek, 17 June 1991, pp. 24-25.

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